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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 000329

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SUBJECT: MFA: CHINA SEEKS COOPERATION ON AFGHANISTAN,
PAKISTAN

REF: BEIJING 177

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4
(B/D).

Summary

¶11. (C) The Chinese Government is paying close attention to any changes in U.S. strategies in Pakistan and Afghanistan, according to an MFA official, and seeks cooperation with the United States and the international community in the region. China will continue to promote stability in South Asia through economic channels, despite the uncertain security environment in Pakistan and Afghanistan for potential Chinese investors. China did not influence Kyrgyzstan to close Manas Air Base, according to the official. End Summary.

¶12. (C) MFA Asian Affairs Department Afghanistan and Pakistan Division Director Zhang Yiming February 10 told PolOff that China wished to have close communication and cooperation on issues of common concern in South Asia, adding that the Chinese Government was paying close attention to any "adjustments in strategy," particularly for Afghanistan and Pakistan, by the new U.S. Administration. Zhang commended U.S.-China cooperation in "playing a constructive role in promoting peace and stability in South Asia" during the immediate aftermath of the November Mumbai terror attacks.

¶13. (C) Noting positively the willingness of international partners to strengthen coordination on stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, Director Zhang affirmed that China "will work continuously" with the international community, including the United States, to increase coordination, as such efforts "are in the common interests" of both China and the United States.

China's Three Policy Targets for Afghanistan

¶14. (C) Director Zhang stated China's three "policy targets" for Afghanistan: 1) "As a neighbor," Zhang said, China hoped Afghanistan can be restored to peace and stability. 2) Terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan "cannot be allowed to grow stronger." Afghanistan had to develop economically and establish social stability. 3) Afghanistan should remain at peace with its neighbors.

¶15. (C) China paid "high attention" to Afghanistan's reconstruction, according to Zhang, adding that in spite of the "severe security situation" in Afghanistan, China "actively encourages" Chinese enterprises to invest in Afghanistan. Such encouragement reflected China's desire to develop economic cooperation with Afghanistan that can "benefit the common people" and "address the root causes of terrorism." China would continue its economic focus on

reconstruction in Afghanistan and "highly appreciates" U.S. support for Chinese investment in natural resource development projects, such as the Aynak copper mine. Zhang further noted that Pakistan had expressed to China interest in serving as a regional corridor for economic development. Supportive of such a role for Pakistan, China planned to involve both Pakistan and Afghanistan in activities related to Aynak mine and other economic assistance projects, thereby helping to build trust between Afghanistan and Pakistan, according to Zhang.

Uncertain Security Situation: "The Biggest Confusion"

¶ 6. (C) Pressed for specifics on possible future Chinese investment activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Zhang said China's economic assistance channel would "only strengthen" in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He noted, however, the "biggest confusion" was the security situation in the two countries. Citing media reports on the recent murder by militants in Pakistan of a kidnapped Polish aid worker and further threats of execution of a kidnapped Chinese telecommunications engineer, Zhang stated that a number of "influential companies do not dare send their employees" to the region. Noting recent EU-China discussions on Afghanistan (reftel), Zhang lauded Czech PRT security outreach efforts with Chinese officials at the Aynak mine in Logan province, and said he hoped that increasing such cooperation on security in other provinces would create a safer investment environment in Afghanistan.

China to Attend SCO Conference on Afghanistan

BEIJING 00000329 002 OF 002

¶ 7. (C) Director Zhang stated that China would send a high-level delegation to the March 25-27 SCO Conference on Afghanistan, most likely at the Assistant Foreign Minister level. PolOff confirmed that the United States was considering participation.

Chinese Questions on Manas and Taliban Reconciliation

¶ 8. (C) In response to a question, Director Zhang denied that China had influenced Kyrgyzstan to close Manas Air Base, but inquired about the combined effect on coalition military operations in Afghanistan of the base closure and the continuing attacks on coalition supply lines in Khyber Pass. PolOff stressed that coalition military operations had not been seriously hampered by attacks on supply lines on the Afghan-Pakistan border and noted that the coalition regularly reviewed logistical arrangements for its military assets and continued to develop new channels for the delivery of supplies. Specific to Manas Air Base, PolOff observed that it would be premature to comment on the effect of Manas' closing as Kyrgyz President Bakiyev only announced his decision on February 3, but to the extent that Manas Air Base supports coalition efforts to establish stability in Afghanistan, a shared goal of the international community, continued coalition access to the air base would also be in the interests of the international community, including China.

¶ 9. (C) Citing media reports that indicated the United States had revised its objectives toward the Taliban, Zhang asked whether the United States hoped to "contain" rather than "eliminate" the Taliban in Afghanistan. PolOff responded that reconciliation with moderate elements of the Taliban was an Afghan-driven process that the United States supported, though no basis existed for reconciliation with Taliban elements who espouse an extremist ideology.

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